

MANDEVILLE AND FRANCE: THE RECEPTION OF *THE FABLE OF THE BEES* IN FRANCE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT

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Abstract

This article explores how *The Fable of the Bees* was received in France, and provides a broad outline of its influence on the philosophers of the French Enlightenment. Reference to Bernard Mandeville's work in French periodicals (between 1720 and 1750), together with a series of disapproving critiques that appeared after the French translation of the *Fable*, indicate keen interest in this author on the part of French intellectuals. Mandeville's reputation both on the Continent and in England as an immoral philosopher and champion of paradoxical theses, had earned him a degree of fame in France even before the publication of the French translation of the *Fable* in 1740. Even if considerably closer to the original than the unpublished translation by Émilie Du Châtelet, this translation reveals a number of discrepancies with respect to Mandeville's text, which — along with the accompanying Introduction — suggest an attempt by the editors to adjust the philosophy and to tone down the shocking ramifications of some of the author's theses. Despite the numerous adverse critiques prompted by the book, the *Fable* had a strong influence on several French authors, such as Voltaire and Jean-François Melon. In particular, Mandeville's reflections on luxury and economics had a major impact on French philosophers, fuelling a heated dispute over luxury, and pointing to the centrality of economic analysis in the study of human society.

Beginning with the pioneering work of F. B. Kaye,¹ historians have explored and analysed various aspects of Bernard Mandeville's work, clearly establishing the influence of this author on European thought in the Enlightenment. By drawing comparisons with the thinking of English and Dutch authors — contemporary as well as those of the second half of the eighteenth century — various studies have brought to light the role of Mandeville's philosophy as source of inspiration for, and driving force behind, subsequent developments in moral and political philosophy, as well as in economic theories.² Less attention, however, has been given to

I should like to thank Catherine Whibley for her encouragement and support during the preparation of this article.

¹ In addition to the contents of his critical edition of the *Fable* (Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees; or Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, ed. by F. B. Kaye (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924)), see also an earlier article: F. B. Kaye, 'The Influence of Bernard Mandeville', *Studies in Philology*, 19 (1922), 83–108.

² See, for example, *Mandeville Studies: New Explorations in the Art and Thought of Dr. Bernard Mandeville*, ed. by Irwin Primer (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975); E. J. Hundert, 'The Thread of Language and the Web of Dominion: Mandeville to Rousseau and Back', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 21 (1987–1988), 169–91; Istvan Hont, 'Free Trade and the Economic Limits to National Politics: Neomachiavellian Political Economy Reconsidered', in *The Economic Limits To Modern Politics*, ed. by John Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 41–120; E. J. Hundert, *The Enlightenment's Fable: Bernard Mandeville and the Discovery of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge

what Edward J. Hundert defines as the 'French connexion' of Mandeville's philosophy,³ that is to say the place that the author's reflection occupies within the history of French philosophy: both what he himself drew from French philosophers — Bayle, La Rochefoucauld, and the neo-Epicureans in particular — and the subsequent influence he was to have on the philosophers of the Enlightenment.⁴ It is precisely this latter aspect — how the *Fable* was received in France, the reactions it aroused, and the doctrines that left the deepest imprint on the thinking of the *philosophes* — that I explore in this study.

The *Fable* reached the height of its popularity in France between 1740 and 1770. Its introduction and dissemination under Louis XV were facilitated by two main factors. Firstly, Mandeville was already well known among the French public as a result of his *Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church and National Happiness*, which was translated into French by Justus van Effen in 1722 (just two years after the first English edition) and reprinted in 1723 and in 1738.⁵ Secondly, the scandal caused by the *Fable* in England gave it some renown in France — prior to its translation — owing mainly to the scholarly and literary press. French periodicals recorded each of Mandeville's texts as they came out and were gradually integrated into the first edition of the *Fable*.⁶ Nor did French periodicals miss the responses Mandeville's writings evoked from the critics: several articles on the author appeared in the 1720s, notably in the *Bibliothèque anglaise* or the *Bibliothèque britannique*, written by Protestant intellectuals based in England.⁷ These circumstances

University Press, 1994); E. J. Hundert, 'Bernard Mandeville and the Enlightenment's Maxims of Modernity', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 56 (1995), 577–93; Istvan Hont, 'The Early Enlightenment Debate on Commerce and Luxury', in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, 2 vols, ed. by Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1, 379–418; and Mikko Tolonen, *Mandeville and Hume: Anatomists of Civil Society*, SVEC 2013:11 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013).

³ See Hundert, *The Enlightenment's Fable*, pp. 96–105; Paulette Carrire also devotes a chapter to Mandeville's influence in England and France in *Bernard Mandeville, passions, vices, vertus* (Paris: Vrin, 1980), pp. 25–35.

⁴ On the French sources of Mandeville's thinking see also Jean Lafond, *L'Homme et son image: morales et littérature de Montaigne à Mandeville* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1996); Pierre Force, *Self-Interest before Adam Smith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Béatrice Guion's recent paper at the conference 'Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the bees*' (12–14 June 2014, Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, University of Helsinki), 'Anatomizing the Invisible Part of Man: Mandeville Reading French Moralists'.

⁵ Bernard de Mandeville, *Pensées libres sur la religion, l'église et le bonheur de la nation*, trans. by Justus van Effen, 2 vols (The Hague: Vaillant and Prevost, 1722). Under the name of Criton (a pseudonym of Mandeville according to P. B. Anderson: 'Cato's Obscure Counterpart in the *British Journal* 1722–1725', *Studies in Philology*, 34 (1937), 412–28), a complaint appeared in the *British Journal* (89, May 1724, n.p.) as to the sparse circulation of the *Free Thoughts* in England (the first edition of 1720 had two reprints at the time, in 1721 and 1723; a second English edition would follow in 1729). This French edition and its reprints thus indicate a certain level of success of the work in France. Another provocative work by Mandeville may also be mentioned, a French translation of which (with at least two reprints) was published before 1740: *The Modest Defense of Publick Stews* (1724), translated into French as *Vénus la populaire, ou Apologie des maisons de joye* and published in 1727 (probably in Holland although the front cover indicates London) and in 1730 (Paris: Mercier). However, as the work was written under a pseudonym (Phil-Porney; Phil-Pornix in French), we cannot assume that its circulation contributed to establishing the author's reputation in France.

⁶ See, for example, the review of *The Fable of the Bees* in the *Bibliothèque raisonnée des ouvrages des savants de l'Europe*, July–September 1729, III, 402–45, and the review of *An Enquiry into the Origin of Honour* in the *Bibliothèque britannique*, April–June 1733, art. 1. Letizia Gai has undertaken a thorough analysis of periodicals in French aimed at identifying references to Mandeville: 'Il Man of Devil attraversa la Manica: Mandeville nei periodici francesi del settecento', *Studi filosofici*, 27 (2004), 217–43.

⁷ For example, both the *Bibliothèque anglaise* (1725, XIII, 197–225) and the *Journal des savants* (November 1725, 664–67) devote articles in praise of the polemic work of George Blewitt (*An Enquiry Whether a General Practice of Virtue Tends to the Wealth and Poverty, Benefit or Disadvantage of a People*, 1725). There is no shortage of reviews of

explain why French intellectuals had no need to await the French translation, which was published in 1740, in order to know the book.⁸ Moreover, several French thinkers were familiar with the book relatively early on: Voltaire, for example, who was in England between 1726 and 1729 when the storm unleashed by the *Fable* was at its peak, doubtless already took an interest in the work at that time, as is shown by the fact that he brought back some copies to Cirey, of which Émilie Du Châtelet drafted the first known French translation. It was probably at Voltaire's request that Du Châtelet began this work in 1735, continuing intermittently until 1738. During this time, she drafted not one but two translations of Mandeville's work, along with several outlines for a Preface, all of which were kept as manuscripts in Voltaire's library: her version of the *Fable* was never to be published.⁹ This translation nevertheless provides significant indications as to the *Fable's* impact on the sensibility of French intellectuals and free thinkers. Indeed, Du Châtelet's prefaces openly express her admiration for English thinking in general,¹⁰ and for Mandeville in particular: 'C'est ie crois le meilleur livre de morale qui ait iamais esté fait [...]. Mandeville qui en est l'auteur peut estre appelé le Montagne [*sic*] des Anglois a cela pres qu'il a plus de methode et des idées plus saines des choses que Montagne'.¹¹

One aspect of this translation would seem of interest: it concerns the latitude of this version with respect to the original (qualified by Felicia Gottmann as a veritable 'transformation' of the *Fable*¹²), a characteristic that was not limited to Du Châtelet's translation. In fact, this licence in interpreting the words of the author, suggestive of an intention to adapt, rather than render an exact or literal version of, Mandeville's text, would appear to be a recurring feature of the French versions of Mandeville's works. This licence cannot be considered innocuous in view of the nature of these texts: while transforming and adapting a text may have been a

Berkeley's *Alciphron* (see, for example, *Bibliothèque raisonnée des ouvrages des savants*, 1732, VIII, 478 and IX, 232). For a complete listing of the reviews of the polemic books against Mandeville, see Gai, 'Il Man of Devil attraversa la Manica', in particular table 2, pp. 237–43. A global view of the controversy unleashed in England by the publication of the *Fable of the Bees* is to be found in the classic reference work on the subject by Paul Sakmann, *Bernard de Mandeville und die Bienenfabel-Controverse: eine Episode in der Geschichte der englischen Aufklärung* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1897).

⁸ *La Fable des abeilles, ou Les fripons devenus bonnetes gens*, 2 vols (London: aux dépens de la Compagnie, 1740).

⁹ The manuscript of this translation is kept in the Russian National Library in St Petersburg, which possesses Voltaire's private library, purchased by Catherine II after his death. See Fernand Caussy, *Inventaire des manuscrits de la bibliothèque de Voltaire conservée à la Bibliothèque impériale publique de Saint-Petersbourg* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970), pp. 43–44. One possible explanation as to why this translation was never published is that it was not a complete translation of Mandeville's work, since it did not include various parts of the original book, such as the poem 'The Grumbling Hive' — which represented the original core of the *Fable*. Du Châtelet's manuscript comprised only her own Preface, a translator's *Avertissement*, the translation of the Preface by Mandeville to the 1714 English edition, a translation of the *Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue*, and part of the *Remarks* (A to L only). On this translation, see Ira O. Wade, *Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet: An Essay on the Intellectual Activity at Cirey* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 24–33; Judith P. Zinsser, 'Entrepreneur of the Republic of Letters: Emilie de Breteuil, Marquise Du Châtelet, and Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*', *French Historical Studies*, 25 (2002), 595–624; and Felicia Gottmann, 'Du Châtelet, Voltaire, and the Transformation of Mandeville's *Fable*', *History of European Ideas*, 38 (2012), 218–32.

¹⁰ 'M'étant déterminée à ce genre de travail, mon estime pour les Anglais et le goût que j'ai toujours eu pour la façon libre et masle de penser et de s'exprimer de ce peuple philosophe, m'ont fait préférer leurs livres à ceux des autres nations'; Du Châtelet, 'Préface du traducteur', qtd in Wade, *Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet*, p. 232.

¹¹ Ibid. The comparison with Montaigne is probably inspired by Mandeville himself, who suggests this parallel in the Preface: *The Fable of the Bees* (London: sold by Tonson, 1729), no pag. [A2v].

¹² Gottmann, 'Du Châtelet, Voltaire, and the Transformation of Mandeville's *Fable*'.

frequent practice, even a celebrated art form in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on the part of translators of literary texts,¹³ the objections formulated with respect to inaccurate translations of philosophical texts indicate that such practice for this type of book was neither implicitly authorized nor approved.

Already prior to the *Fable*, a similar latitude with respect to Mandeville's text can be detected, for example, in the periphrases chosen by Van Effen in his version of the *Free Thoughts*, rendering the translation considerably more distant from the original than the secret, anonymous version recently edited by Paulette and Lucien Carrive.¹⁴ The changes made here by Van Effen were not the result of any ineptness on his part but instead may be ascribed to his intention to render certain passages more incisive, perhaps more in line with his own sensibility — not just philosophical but also religious.¹⁵ While not openly distorting Mandeville's text, Van Effen embellished it with words and images that added emphasis to some statements, thereby highlighting some parts of the discourse more than others.¹⁶

Similarly, a certain freedom of interpretation in the choice of key terms, rather than the style, is also to be found in the first published French translation of the *Fable* — that of 1740. This divergence was immediately denounced in the *Mémoires de Trévoux* (a Jesuit periodical), which devoted three lengthy articles to this French translation in the issues of June, August, and November 1740 respectively.¹⁷ The French version referred to is attributed to a Swiss man of letters, Jean Bertrand.¹⁸

¹³ On this subject see, for example, Mary Helen McMurrin, *The Spread of Novels, Translation and Prose Fiction in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), and in particular pp. 72–98.

¹⁴ See Paulette Carrive, 'Introduction' to Bernard de Mandeville, *Pensées libres sur la Religion, sur l'église, et sur le bonheur national*, ed. by Paulette and Lucien Carrive (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000), pp. 7–30, and in particular pp. 21–22. This is the edition of a manuscript probably dating from the second half of the eighteenth century. The translation by Van Effen strayed so far from the original that Henry de Sauzet, author of the *Bibliothèque française*, concluded in his 'Éloge' of Van Effen that '[...] il traduit de l'Anglois du Docteur Mandevill [sic] les *Pensées Libres sur la Religion, L'Eglise & le Bonheur de la Nation* [...] Traduction qui parut si originale, qu'on fut quelque tems en doute si c'en étoit véritablement une'; *Bibliothèque française*, 1737, xxv, 145. In terms of the dates of publication of the French translations of these works, it is worth noting that the French version of *Free Thoughts* preceded that of the *Fable* by almost twenty years, while in England, this latter work appeared sixteen years before the *Free Thoughts*.

¹⁵ Justus van Effen was a journalist and scholar, well acquainted with classical languages and with French, which he preferred to Dutch in his writings. His translation of *Free Thoughts* was written with clarity and elegance in excellent French. It is interesting to note that he deletes a reference, for example, to the assistance of God's Spirit. Where Mandeville wrote that '[t]he Duties of a Christian are to believe the misterious as well as the historical Truth of the Gospel and, by the assistance of God's Spirit to live up to the Rules of it' (*Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church and National Happiness* (London: sold by Jauncy and Roberts, 1720), p. 2), Van Effen translates: 'Notre religion [...] veut que nous soyons persuadés des Vérités Mystérieuses, aussi bien que des Vérités historiques de l'Evangile; et que nous fassions les plus grands Efforts, pour en suivre les Loix et les Préceptes'; *Pensées libres sur la religion*, p. 2 (emphasis mine).

¹⁶ Thus, for example, in the Introduction to the first part of the work, in which Mandeville proposed his classification of speculative and practical atheists, the French text seems to adopt the tone of an indictment of libertines that was typical of the apologetic literature. Its arguments go well beyond Mandeville's text, adding details of such behaviour as well as the social conditions that induce libertinism. Compare Van Effen's translation, *Pensées libres sur la religion*, pp. 6–7, with Mandeville, *Free Thoughts*, pp. 4–5.

¹⁷ See *Mémoires de Trévoux*, June 1740, 941–81, art. XLII; August 1740, 1596–1636, art. LXXIV; and November 1740, 2103–47, art. CI. The last two articles, however, contained not a review but a real indictment of Mandeville's doctrine.

¹⁸ His name does not, however, figure in the book: see Antoine-Alexandre Barbier, *Dictionnaire des pseudonymes et anonymes*, 4 vols (Paris: Barrois, 1823), II, 2. Also on Bertrand, see Johann G. W. Dunkels, *Historisch-keritische Nachrichten von verstorbenen Gelehrten*, 2 vols (Coöthen: In der Cörnerischen Buchhandlung, 1753), I, 102; and 'Éloge historique de M. Jean Bertrand, pasteur de l'église d'Orbe', *Nouveau Journal helvétique* (January 1778), 25–27.

Although the cover indicates that the translation was printed in London, it was probably printed early in the same year in Amsterdam, where Bertrand was then working as a translator. The articles in the *Mémoires de Trévoux* deplored the presence in this French version (which included some footnotes) of distortions at several levels with respect to the original. These inconsistencies concern firstly the book's structure: the order of presentation of the essays composing the sixth edition of the *Fable* is changed for no apparent reason and, in the opinion of the reviewer, to the detriment of the coherence and comprehensibility of the text.¹⁹ But, above all, the reviewer was keen to draw the reader's attention to the inaccuracy of the translation itself. Already apparent in 'La Ruche mécontente', the poem at the beginning of the book, and certainly not attributable to metric constraints (the rhymes not being reproduced in the French text), were disparities in several passages of the French text.²⁰ The unnamed author of the review ascribed some of these inaccuracies to the incompetence of the translator, but others, on the contrary, to the latter's intention to render essentially scandalous ideas more acceptable.²¹ The example quoted by the reviewer is significant, as it concerns one of the most criticized theories of Mandeville's thinking, notably that of the 'invention' of vice and virtue:

L'Auteur Anglois dit, que les politiques, qui, pour se les mieux soumettre, travaillèrent les premiers à rendre les hommes sociables [...] inventèrent pour eux *une récompense imaginaire*, c'est-à-dire, la persuasion intime qu'il est beau de vaincre ses passions. Le Traducteur a senti qu'il étoit choquant de représenter cette persuasion comme une chimère, pur fruit de l'imagination & de la politique; & pour cela il substitué au mot Anglois *imaginary* imaginaire, celui d'*universelle*, *récompense universelle*.²²

In actual fact, the translator used the expression 'récompense générale' and not 'récompense universelle' to translate Mandeville's words, and this change did not entail a real alteration to the text as a whole: in other passages where the concept reappears there is no ambiguity in the definition of moral virtues as the product of political ruse. It is nevertheless interesting that it was this very passage which captured the reviewer's attention, and that he should immediately interpret this change as guile on the part of the translator. The reviewer's reaction indicates that this concept of Mandeville's theory was particularly contentious. This is also

¹⁹ The first volume of this edition contained the Preface, the poem 'The Grumbling Hive', the Introduction, the 'Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue', the 'Remarks', the 'Essay on Charity and Charity-Schools', the 'Search into the Nature of Society', the 'Vindication of the Book'; the second volume contained the 'Dialogue between Horatio, Cleomenes, and Fulvia'. In the French translation the order of the 'Remarks' and the 'Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue' is reversed. The French version appeared in four in-12 volumes.

²⁰ To take just one example, see the lines on the government of the hive: 'They were no slaves to Tyranny | Nor rul'd by wild democracy' ('The Grumbling Hive', in Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1732), p. 1, unnumbered); to which the French translator gave a special twist: 'ni les malheureuses esclaves d'une dure tyrannie, ni exposées aux cruels désordres de la féroce démocratie' ('La Ruche murmurante', in Mandeville, *La Fable des abeilles*, p. 2).

²¹ 'Il en est plusieurs [de différences entre le texte et la traduction] qu'on ne peut attribuer à la négligence ou à l'inattention du traducteur et qu'une intelligence plus parfaite de l'Anglois l'aurait apparemment mis à portée d'éviter'; the example being given is the translation of the expression 'out of a rational ambition of being good' by 'si l'on en excepte l'ambition raisonnable d'être bon'; *Mémoires de Trévoux*, August 1740, p. 1600, art. LXXIV.

²² Ibid., pp. 1598–99 (emphases original).

indirectly confirmed by Du Châtelet's translation: while her translation is characterized in general by its lack of conformity with the original, and by the liberties she took with Mandeville's text, she only really changed the meaning (with no explanatory indications) of specific passages, as analysed in detail by Judith Zinsser.²³ Among them we find the very same sections of the 'Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue' that set forth Mandeville's theory of the 'invention' of morality and his definition of vice and virtue. By substituting her own theory for that of Mandeville, Du Châtelet makes the author say that virtue, far from being an imaginary recompense, originates from a 'universal law for all men that God himself engraves in their hearts'.²⁴ Moreover, virtue is presented in this translation as the source of the well-being of society — a statement that of course annihilates (or resolves) the paradox on which the entire *Fable* is founded, holding vice as the origin of a society's prosperity.

The adjustments made by Du Châtelet, combined with the focus of the reviewer's comments on the same aspects of the *Fable*, confirm that Mandeville's reflections on morality must have constituted the main barriers to the acceptance of his work by the French public. His heterodox ideas prompted the author of the article in the *Mémoires de Trévoux*, at the end of the third instalment of the review to condemn the book as immoral and pernicious. The editors of the French translation were also to dwell on these theories as they endeavoured to formulate the apologia in the somewhat unusual 'Avertissement au lecteur'. Indeed, this Introduction (the content of which could also explain the doubts of the reviewer of the *Mémoires de Trévoux* regarding the accuracy of the translation) presented Mandeville's book as ironic in character, implying that all the polemics it had provoked in England resulted from a misunderstanding as to the genre and intention of the text:

Nous ne comprenons pas même comment on a pu se tromper sur la manière d'écrire de cet Auteur. Il dit lui-même qu'il a écrit ironiquement. Pourquoi, je vous prie, ne l'en croirons nous pas? [...] Puis donc qu'il nous a lui-même appris qu'il ne parloit pas sérieusement sur ces divers articles dont on se plaint, la justice et le bon sens demandent également qu'on les lise et qu'on les envisage comme ironiques.²⁵

The controversy generated by these views again comes down to Mandeville's theories on virtue and vice, since the work's so-called irony authorized the booksellers to claim that 'Mr. Mandeville [...] n'a eu pour but que de tourner en ridicule les vices et les extravagances des Hommes [...]. Son unique dessein a été de tourner en ridicule ces Coutumes et ces Vices, bien-loin de les défendre et de les autoriser'.²⁶

In support of their argument, the authors of this 'Avertissement' cite a few lines from the review of the English version of the *Fable* that had appeared ten years earlier in the *Bibliothèque raisonnée*, a passage carefully extracted from a commentary which did not, however, spare the book from criticism, and which concluded that

²³ See Zinsser, 'Entrepreneur of the Republic of Letters', pp. 615–19.

²⁴ Qtd in Zinsser, 'Entrepreneur of the Republic of Letters', p. 616.

²⁵ 'Avertissement des libraires', in Mandeville, *Fable des abeilles*, 1, 5.

²⁶ 'Avertissement des libraires', 1, 2 and 4.

at best it was not unworthy of being read by those 'qui sont capables de démêler le faux qui y règne d'avec ce qui est vrai independemment des aparences. S'il se trouve dans ces ouvrages des pensées fausses, hazardées et dangereuses, il s'y trouve aussi des reflexions justes, ingenieuses et peut-être nouvelles.'²⁷ This assessment, by one of the Huguenot writers in England acquainted with Pierre Desmaizeaux and therefore close to the culture of the free thinkers, represents perhaps the least hostile censure of the *Fable* to appear in a French periodical. Henri Du Sauzet (a Huguenot writer based in the Low Countries), on the other hand, in the review published in his *Bibliothèque française* in 1740, was closer to the opinion of the reviewer in the *Mémoires de Trévoux* when he stated that the work contained a host of dangerous principles: 'On l'a accusé de saper les fondemens de la Religion et de la Morale et il est effectivement plein de raisonnemens qui leur porteraient bien des atteintes si on les admettait avec toutes les conséquences qu'on en peut tirer'.²⁸ The reviewer concluded that the hostility that the work had provoked in England and its frosty reception in France were well deserved.²⁹ This last observation, however, seems incorrect, judging by the strength of the reactions aroused by the publication of the French translation of the work. The precautions taken in preparing the French version — the lengthy 'Avertissement des libraires' defining the *Fable* as belonging to the category of 'Ouvrages Ironiques' — failed to render Mandeville's work 'harmless'. Yet this explanation of the author's intentions did not protect the translation of the *Fable* from censorship, either by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, issued in 1744,³⁰ or by the Sorbonne, the following year.³¹ Despite all this, a second edition of the translation by Bertrand was published in 1750,³² and perhaps a third in 1760 (of which I have not found any trace, but which Goldbach assumes to have existed³³).

Beyond the reviews that appeared in periodicals, reactions to the publication of the *Fable* in France can be found in many polemical texts, such as, for example, Charles-Irénée de Saint-Pierre's short essay 'Contre l'opinion de Mandeville', one of Louis Charpentier's *Lettres critiques*, and the two articles in the *Mémoires de Trévoux*, which were more a refutation than a review of the *Fable*.³⁴ Jacques-François Deluc,

²⁷ *Bibliothèque raisonnée des ouvrages des savants de l'Europe*, July–September 1729, III, 445.

²⁸ *Bibliothèque française, ou Histoire littéraire de la France*, 1740, XXI, 316.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

³⁰ Decree of 18 August 1744. See J. M. De Bujanda, *Index librorum prohibitorum* (Montreal: Médiaspaul, 2002), p. 578.

³¹ Decree of 22 May 1745. See Gabriel Peignot, *Dictionnaire critique, littéraire et bibliographique des principaux livres condamnés au feu*, 2 vols (Paris: Renouard, 1806), I, 282.

³² London: Jean Nourse, 1750. Like the first, this second edition was probably printed in the Low Countries. The fictitious name of 'Jean Nourse' was used to publish forbidden books or clandestine literature in French both in France and in the Low Countries.

³³ Paul Goldbach, *Bernard de Mandeville's Bienenfabel* (Halle: Zacharias, 1886), p. 5. Kaye relates this information but expresses some reservation about it (*Fable of the Bees*, ed. Kaye, I, xxxvii).

³⁴ Charles-Irénée, Abbé de Saint-Pierre, 'Contre l'opinion de Mandeville', in *Ouvrages [sic] de politique et de morale*, 16 vols (Rotterdam: Jean Daniel Beman, 1741), xvi, 143–56; Louis Charpentier, 'Lettre IX', in *Lettres critiques sur divers écrits de nos jours contraires à la religion et aux mœurs* (London: n.p., 1751), pp. 82–104; *Mémoires de Trévoux*, August 1740, 1596–1636, art. LXXIV, and November 1740, 2103–47, art. CI. The present study is strictly limited to texts explicitly devoted to the *Fable*, and omits those that refer only in passing to Mandeville's theories, as was notably the case in Rousseau. Also of interest is the translation by Étienne de Silhouette of William Warburton's *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated in Dissertations sur l'union de la Religion, de la morale et de la politique* (London: Darré,

a Genevan political activist, leader of the 'Parti populaire', and a sometime friend of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, published a *Lettre critique sur la Fable des abeilles* and a second rejection of the work (along the lines of the first) included in the *Observations sur les savans incredulés*, in 1746 and 1762 respectively.³⁵ In these texts, as in Charpentier's *Lettres critiques*, the main issue at stake was the so-called irony of the work, as claimed in the 'Avertissement' of the French translation.³⁶ This interpretation was irrevocably rejected: no traces of the irony proclaimed by the French editors were to be found in the work. Moreover, the only ironic and sarcastic passages in the *Fable*, Deluc claimed, were all directed against virtue or religion.³⁷ Even Mandeville's own apology for his intentions was derided by his French critics, for whom there could be little doubt that the author was pursuing a specific goal in writing the *Fable*, and that his reflections were aimed at Christian societies and not the hypothetical figure of an enigmatic 'homme en général'.³⁸

Having dismissed the statements that tended to limit or attenuate the thesis of the book, the French-speaking critics attacked Mandeville's vision of morality — the very same concepts Du Châtelet had already found problematic. They focused specifically on the paradox whereby vice represented a necessary benefit for civil society, bringing precious advantages for its prosperity. The general goal of the book, according to Deluc, was to portray 'le vice comme le soutien le plus aimable et le plus nécessaire de la prospérité des Etats. [...] C'est ici qu'il emprunte la voix du serpent ancien pour séduire la raison de ses Lecteurs'.³⁹ Charpentier was also to voice his opposition to the notion of the usefulness of vice to society, which he considered to be the main thesis of the *Fable*, as did the author of articles LXXIV and CI of the *Mémoires de Trévoux*. Where Charpentier used sarcasm in a peremptory but superficial attack, the writer for the *Mémoires de Trévoux* devised eleven

1742), see Dissertation 3, 'Examen des sentiments de M. Mandeville, auteur de la *Fable des abeilles* sur l'utilité des vices dans la société', pp. 113–26. This book was presented as a translation of Warburton whereas in fact it was a re-adaptation with some new elements.

³⁵ Jacques-François Deluc, *Lettre critique sur la Fable des abeilles* (Geneva: Henri-Albert Gosse, 1746) and *Observations sur les savans incredulés et sur quelques-uns de leurs écrits* (Geneva: n.p., 1762), pp. 302–35. On Deluc, see Douglas G. Creighton, *Jacques-François Deluc of Geneva and his Friendship with Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (University, MS: University of Mississippi Romance Monographs, 1982).

³⁶ See Charpentier, *Lettres critiques*, p. 84.

³⁷ 'Je ne ferai pas plus d'attention aux raisons de plaisanterie, de badinage, et d'ironie que son Traducteur allégué pour le défendre, qu'aux protestations que l'Auteur fait lui-même de n'avoir jamais eu intention de prêcher le vice. L'ironie ne regne point si sourdement dans un Ouvrage de quatre volumes, qu'on ne l'aperçoive quelquefois, et je n'ai jamais vu dans celui-ci que des raisonnemens métaphysiques qui n'ont point du tout l'air d'un badinage; ces raisons prouvent au contraire contre l'Auteur'; Charpentier, *Lettres critiques*, p. 84. See also Deluc, *Lettre critique*, pp. 5–6.

³⁸ Charpentier mocked Mandeville's pretension as follows: 'Phinéas prend sa canne et son chapeau, court de rues en rues sans avoir d'affaires dans aucunes, et rentre chez lui ne sachant pas encore pourquoi il en est sorti. Phinéas est-il bien sensé: Un Auteur qui fait un livre, élève un système sur des raisonnemens tels quels et qui, si on lui demande le *cui bono* de tout cela, répond ingénument qu'il n'en sait rien, ne me paroît pas plus sage'; Charpentier, *Lettres critiques*, p. 82. For Deluc, Mandeville's explanations, added by precaution to the Preface of the *Fable* and specifying that his theory was limited to a particular part or phase of humanity, were vain and hypocritical. He pointed out that when Mandeville tells the Lecteur 'de se souvenir une fois pour toutes que quand il parle des hommes il n'entend par là ni les Juifs ni les Chrétiens. De qui veut-il donc parler? Des hommes, dit-il, qui sont dans l'état de la simple nature et dans l'ignorance du vrai Dieu. Après cet Avertissement qui ne croiroit que c'est de quelques Peuples de Tartarie dont il va décrire les mœurs et la Religion? Point du tout, c'est de l'Angleterre. Ce Royaume, direz-vous n'est-il pas Chrétien?'; Deluc, *Lettre critique*, p. 4 (emphases original).

³⁹ Deluc, *Lettre critique*, p. 11.

arguments, accompanied systematically by a series of possible counter-objections over eighty pages.⁴⁰ These arguments, which included considerations on the origins of civil society, led the critic — like Deluc⁴¹ — to more theoretical reflections on the nature of man, responding to the author by contending that man is by nature sociable and inclined to virtue. It is interesting to note that the theories expounded by Mandeville on man's nature and on the artificial character of human society had also been amended by Du Châtelet in her version of the *Fable*. Whereas the critic undertook to proceed by minute analysis, refuting the disturbing doctrines with arguments and examples, Du Châtelet, as an entrepreneur of the Republic of Letters, chose simply to 'correct' Mandeville by replacing his Hobbesian anthropological paradigm with that of a man drawn to society by love.⁴² For his part, in order to demonstrate that 'l'homme naît nécessairement sociable et avec un penchant naturel pour la société et le commerce de ses semblables', the writer for the *Mémoires de Trévoux* went so far as to question the sources used by the author of the *Fable*, especially La Rochefoucauld and Hobbes, in order to demonstrate that they had been misinterpreted.⁴³ He observed that La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes* 'sont bien éloignées de justifier cet étrange paradoxe' and that they have 'aucun rapport aux folles prétentions de Mandeville'; as for Hobbes, 'philosophe si dangereux et si justement décrié', 'il convient qu'il y auroit de la stupidité à nier que les hommes par une nécessité que la nature leur impose *natura cogente* cherchent à se rapprocher les uns des autres'.⁴⁴

Besides this consensus of indictment (the usefulness of vice; the nature of man), portraying Mandeville as the 'apologiste du vice' (atheist according to Deluc), and as an author despising truth, reason, and common sense, the French authors criticized other specific aspects of his work — such as, for example, the concept of self-love, which had already caught the attention of the English censors of the *Fable*.⁴⁵ Deluc and the Abbé de Saint-Pierre in particular, while highlighting the contradictions of his philosophy, denounced in Mandeville an excessive rigour in his vision of virtue, self-love, and passions. Mandeville's portrayal of virtue as an illusion founded on passions resulting from perverted pride, was the result of an incorrect vision of this self-love, which according to Deluc derived from a

⁴⁰ For an example of Charpentier's sarcasm, see his *Lettres critiques*, pp. 83–84: 'Si un scélérat, un brigand, sont tourmentés par hasard de remords, qu'ils lisent la Fable des Abeilles: ils y verront que leurs crimes servent à procurer la gloire, l'abondance, et les plaisirs dans un état'.

⁴¹ Deluc, *Lettre critique*, pp. 13–20 and 34–40.

⁴² See Zinsser, 'Entrepreneur of the Republic of Letters', pp. 609, 615. Du Châtelet gave herself the title of 'entrepreneur of the Republic of Letters' as a translator, apparently to allow herself the liberty to change the text she was translating as if it were a literary text.

⁴³ On the role of La Rochefoucauld and Hobbes as sources of Mandeville's thinking, see James Dean Young, 'Mandeville: A Popularizer of Hobbes', *Modern Language Notes*, 74 (1959), 10–13; Douglas J. Den Uyl, 'Passion, State and Progress: Spinoza and Mandeville on the Nature of Human Association', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 25 (1987), 369–95; Laurence Dickey, 'Pride, Hypocrisy and Civility in Mandeville's Social and Historical Theory', *Critical Review*, 4 (1990), 387–431; and Francesca Pongiglione, *Bernard Mandeville. Ragione e passioni* (Rome: Studium, 2013), pp. 97–105.

⁴⁴ *Mémoires de Trévoux*, November 1740, art. CI, 2107–09.

⁴⁵ Notably Archibald Campbell who, like other authors in this analysis, deplores the excessive rigour of Mandeville's interpretation of self-love. See, on this subject, Christian Maurer, 'What Can an Egoist Say against an Egoist? On Archibald Campbell's Criticisms of Bernard Mandeville', *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 12 (2014), 1–18.

source that was 'très pure',⁴⁶ arising from a natural but divine inclination to happiness, inciting mankind to aspire to virtue. For the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, too, Mandeville was like those '[a]uteurs de Morale un peu misantropes qui n'aiment pas à estimer les hommes', in that he failed to consider, firstly, the existence of various typologies of pleasures and passions (innocent, virtuous and unjust), and, secondly, the fact that 'l'amour propre innosant et l'amour propre vertueux sont actifs aussi bien que l'amour propre injuste. Ils excitent les hommes au travail & servent tous à augmenter les richesses & le bonheur des Républiques.'⁴⁷ Not only was there a paradox but also a contradiction: this vision of self-love, close to the Augustinianism of Nicole and La Rochefoucauld, appeared to this critic to be inconsistent with the 'apologia' for vice that constituted the leitmotiv of the *Fable*. Both Deluc and the Abbé de Saint-Pierre detected here an incoherence that was to trouble critical historians for a long time: did Mandeville really intend with his vision of morality to exalt vice and passions by demonstrating their social usefulness, or rather to insist, like the Augustinians, that true virtue was to be found elsewhere than in social relations and dynamics, and could only result from self-denial?⁴⁸

In view of these contradictions, as well as the paradoxical inversions of virtue and vice with respect to the well-being and prosperity of civil society which were at the heart of the work, the French critics of the *Fable* were unanimous in concluding that Mandeville had succumbed to his own ambition to create an original and singular system: in his desire to be original his aspirations had backfired, prompting him to reach conclusions that were ever more irrational and morally pernicious,⁴⁹ representing a 'venin' that Deluc and the other critics were keen to stop.⁵⁰ Though well intentioned these remarks, written in the 1740s, were already outdated: as the translation appeared in France, the *Fable's* poison (to repeat Deluc's metaphor) had already begun to act upon some authors, familiar with the work as a result of their contact with the English intelligentsia.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Deluc, *Lettre critique*, p. 12.

⁴⁷ Saint-Pierre, *Ouvrages de politique*, XVI, 147, 205.

⁴⁸ On these two interpretations, still maintained by the critics, see the study by Hector Monro, *The Ambivalence of Bernard Mandeville* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

⁴⁹ The journalist of the *Mémoires de Trévoux* was the most withering in his judgement: 'M. de Mandeville vouloit se donner un air de Philosophe, enfanter un système, composer des sociétés comme Descartes a construit des mondes [. . .]. Malheureusement pour M. de Mandeville, le succès n'a point répondu à ses vûës. Il n'a réussi qu'à inventer une Philosophie objet d'horreur pour les gens vertueux, et objet de mépris pour les gens qui pensent'; *Mémoires de Trévoux*, November 1740, art. CI, 2107. While recognizing that Mandeville had been blinded by his ambition to appear original, the Abbé de Saint-Pierre shows a greater indulgence, dismissing any bad intention on the part of the author: 'Au lieu d'un dessein sage', he wrote, 'il a voulu se singularizer, en choizissant un but extravagant, en prétendant solemant de prouver des thèses pernicieuses à la société [. . .] de sorte que contre son intention, il s'est fait soupçonner avec fondement d'avoir eu de mauvais desseins contre le bonheur de la société. Voilà ce que lui a produit non une passion vertueuse pour la distinction, mais une passion folle et injuste pour des singularitez pernicieuses'; Saint-Pierre, *Ouvrages de politique*, XVI, 210–11. Charpentier, for his part, commented on the pernicious singularity of Mandeville's reasoning (*Lettres critiques*, p. 104).

⁵⁰ 'Si vous trouvez que mes réflexions puissent contribuer à servir de préservatif contre le venin, tant de ces quatre chefs que de quelques autres que j'ai touché, je m'estimerai très heureux d'être parvenu au but que je me suis proposé'; Deluc, *Lettre critique*, p. 47.

⁵¹ The most complete account of Mandeville's influence on French authors of the eighteenth century remains F. Grégoire, *Bernard de Mandeville et la 'Fable des abeilles'* (Nancy: Thomas, 1947), pp. 177–215.

Tracing the positive influence that the *Fable* had on the philosophers of the French Enlightenment is made difficult by the lack of explicit references to Mandeville: while his critics do not hesitate to denounce Mandeville directly, the authors who take on his theses often prefer to refrain from mentioning their source. We may, however, detect a major axis of influence that reveals a strange phenomenon in the reception of the *Fable* in France. While the paradox of vice being beneficial to society that dominated Mandeville's morality had been directly attacked by his critics and denounced as unacceptable and pernicious, the main example proposed by the author in support of this very principle — that of the usefulness of luxury — conversely convinced and seduced several authors. This was certainly the case of Voltaire⁵² — already mentioned as having promoted the first translation of the *Fable* — and that of an economist held in high esteem by the *philosophes*: Jean-François Melon.⁵³ In his poem of 1736, *Le Mondain*, Voltaire reformulated in rhyme some of the *Fable*'s reflections on luxury and on the usefulness of vice (without, however, directly quoting Mandeville).⁵⁴ Melon took up and popularized in France some of Mandeville's theses in his *Essai politique sur le commerce*, a book that was well known among the *philosophes*, and of which there were four editions in eight years.⁵⁵ Melon and Voltaire, in other words, adopted Mandeville's thought and adapted it to their respective personal agendas.

Mandeville's work represented — both directly and by way of these interpretations — an essential contribution to (though not the original spark of) one of the fiercest and most absorbing intellectual debates of the second half of the eighteenth century in France: the controversy over luxury. In a study that attempts to reconstitute and analyse the bibliographical basis of this controversy, Dominique Margairaz identified no fewer than 160 works debating the subject, most of them drafted between 1748 and 1787.⁵⁶ One of the last contributions was the *Traité philosophique et politique sur le luxe*, by the Abbé Pluquet.⁵⁷ This essay, all the more interesting in that it was written by one of the protagonists of the controversy, begins with a historiographical reconstruction of the debate, and names

⁵² On the influence of Mandeville's work on Voltaire, see Gabriel Bonno, *La Culture et la civilisation britanniques devant l'opinion française de la Paix d'Utrecht aux 'Lettres philosophiques' (1713–1734)* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, June 1948), pp. 100–01; A. Owen Aldridge, 'Mandeville and Voltaire', in *Mandeville Studies*, ed. by Primer, pp. 142–56; and Carrive, *Bernard Mandeville, passions, vices, vertus*, pp. 32–33.

⁵³ Melon was private secretary to John Law in 1718–1720. He would have read the *Fable* in 1717.

⁵⁴ Voltaire, *Le Mondain*, ed. by Haydn T. Mason, in *Les Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, 16: *Œuvres de 1736* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2003), pp. 295–303. It is interesting to note that this poem was already associated with the *Fable des abeilles* by Charpentier in his *Lettre critique*. In contesting Mandeville, he also includes Voltaire, as he begins to examine the question of the usefulness of luxury: 'S'il falloit avoir un carrosse, des habits galonnés, une table à plusieurs services, pour en jouir [du bonheur], les trois quarts des homes ne pourroient y aspirer. Je vois l'Auteur du *Mondain* qui rit de cette pensée, et me regarde d'un œil de compassion. J'admire sa Poesie; mais ses principes me font pitié à moi-même'; Charpentier, *Lettres critiques*, p. 93.

⁵⁵ Jean-François Melon, *Essai politique sur le commerce* (n.p.: no pub., 1734). Subsequent editions appeared in 1735, 1736, 1742, 1754, and 1761.

⁵⁶ Dominique Margairaz, 'La Querelle du luxe au XVIII^e siècle', in *Le Luxe en France du siècle des 'Lumières' à nos jours*, ed. by Jacques Marseille (Paris: Association pour le développement de l'histoire économique, 1999), pp. 25–37. It is worth noting that 1748 was the year of publication of *De l'esprit des lois*.

⁵⁷ François-André-Adrien, Abbé Pluquet, *Traité philosophique et politique sur le luxe*, 2 vols (Paris: Barrois, 1786). Pluquet had already quoted and contested Mandeville in his book *De la sociabilité*, 2 vols (Paris: Barrois, 1767).

Mandeville as having initiated the quarrel that so much captured the interest of French intellectuals:

Le luxe qui n'avoit été jusqu'alors que l'objet du zèle des théologiens et des moralistes religieux, devint le sujet d'une discussion philosophique et politique, sur laquelle on a adopté l'opinion de Mandeville ou des théologiens Anglois; mais avec les différences et les modifications que produisent, dans les opinions philosophiques, les idées particulières de ceux qui les embrassent [...]. Ainsi [...] selon mes connoissances ce n'est que depuis Mandeville, que l'on a recherché et discuté philosophiquement et politiquement, la nature du luxe pour en prouver, ou pour en combattre l'utilité.⁵⁸

The themes of the *Fable* thus represented a real landmark in the debate, marking one of the two poles between which the crucial question of luxury and its numerous implications was thrashed out. In parallel, in France, as in Scotland and in England, Mandeville's work gave a huge boost to the development and definition of political economics as a field of reflection on the workings of dynamic forces in society.⁵⁹ It was Melon, a declared disciple of Mandeville, who was considered by Diderot and by Maupertuis as the founding father of political economics in France.⁶⁰ Whether approved or contested, Mandeville's theories constituted a provocative challenge for authors directly interested in economic matters. Indeed one of the primary revelations of the *Fable* for the French Enlightenment was the vital role of economics in any analysis of society. This impression, shared by several French authors, was also to be confirmed some decades later in a review of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Contrary to the claim made by William Playfair in his Introduction to Smith's work,⁶¹ it was not Quesnay who should be considered as having introduced economics in France: 'It was another Doctor, an Englishman (Dr Mandeville), who seems to have been at the bottom of all that has been written on this subject [economics], either by Dr Smith or the French (Economists).'⁶²

Mandeville's philosophy, as we have seen, was not received in France as a complete entity nor as a definitive system of thought that might engender a veritable philosophical legacy; rather, it was perceived as a mass of elements that could be adapted to the interests of various authors and dismantled according to their varying intellectual needs. In short, two aspects of Mandeville's work seem to have had a particular impact on France at the time of the Enlightenment: on the one

⁵⁸ Pluquet, *Traité philosophique*, 1, 15–16.

⁵⁹ On the emergence in France of economics as an autonomous discipline, and on the role played by Melon and Voltaire in this process as well as in the controversy over luxury, see Anoush Fraser Terjanian, *Commerce and its Discontents in Eighteenth-Century French Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), notably pp. 1–23.

⁶⁰ Diderot wrote of Melon that he 'a le premier remué des matières économiques', such that 'sans lui peut-être toute école économique serait encore à naître'; Diderot, 'Éphémérides du Citoyen', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Jules Assézat and Maurice Tourneux, 20 vols (Paris: Garnier, 1875), IV, 82. In his *Éloge de Montesquieu* Maupertuis compared the greatness of Montesquieu with that of Melon, and stated that the latter had brought political economics from England to France — a science that was as yet unnamed. Maupertuis, *Éloge de Montesquieu*, in *Œuvres de Mr. de Maupertuis*, 4 vols (Lyon: Bruyset, 1756), III, 416–17.

⁶¹ William Playfair, 'The Life of Dr Adam Smith', in Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. by Playfair, 3 vols (London: Cadell and Davies: 1805), I, xi–xxvi.

⁶² Review of Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, in *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, 22 (1806), 353–68 (p. 356).

hand, his vision of morals, founded on the anthropological frame of reference — of Epicurean origin, and that overturned the classical paradigm of vice and virtue — of a man dominated by his passions; on the other hand, the economic analysis of society, including the theory on luxury, which resulted in an abiding awareness that any study of society could no longer ignore such aspects. These two major elements of the work's influence emerged from the heterogeneous nature of Mandeville's philosophy, which, while clearly following the traditional furrow of the neo-Epicureans and of Hobbes, was applied to themes that were at the heart of current thinking in England and in the Low Countries.